

Libby Superfund proposal listed in Federal Register

Libby moved one step closer to Superfund listing for asbestos contamination Tuesday with the publication of a formal proposal by the Environmental Protection Agency in the Federal Register.

The EPA's proposal to add Libby to the National Priorities List begins a 60-day period during which citizens may send EPA their comments on the proposed listing.

The NPL is a published list of U.S. hazardous waste sites that are eligible for extensive, long-term cleanup under the Superfund program. Listing on the NPL makes the site eligible to

receive federal funds for cleanup while EPA seeks to recover costs from the responsible parties.

Placing the site on the NPL also allows EPA to use Superfund money for cleanup when there are no responsible parties who can pay for the work. When the trust fund is used, the state of Montana assumes 10 percent of the cleanup costs.

In January EPA received a formal written request from Gov. Judy Martz requesting that Libby be added to the NPL due to asbestos contamination associated with W.R. Grace's former vermiculite mine. In exercising this

request, the governor used the state's one-time privilege of naming a site as its highest priority for designation to the NPL. Even with the governor's request, there is still a public comment period, although the scope of comments to which EPA must respond is limited.

After the 60-day comment period, EPA headquarters will respond to the comments and make a final decision on whether or not to list the site on the NPL.

EPA and the state Department of Environmental Quality will continue to study and identify asbestos distribution in Libby,

stepping up investigation of residences and businesses. The agencies will examine possible cleanup options and begin designing appropriate cleanup actions.

Funding for this year's work is already approved and does not hinge on the final listing. Final priority list status must be determined, however, before the EPA can use the Superfund trust fund to pay for long-term cleanup.

The boundary of the site is not yet established and will depend on where asbestos is found to pose a health risk. The current focus of EPA's work will be in

Libby and not at the mine site. Questions about the stigma that Superfund may bring to the city of Libby have been considered in discussions about whether or not to add part or all of Libby and the mine site to EPA's list of priority sites for cleanup.

Investigations at the mine site will be minimal until the risks in the town are eliminated. Air blowing off the mine site and spring runoff from the mine site are two measurements that EPA will make to collect some basic data for future assessment of the mine itself. These results will provide additional information to

make decisions about potential cleanup actions.

Information that EPA used to document the proposed listing of the site is available from: U. S. EPA Records Center, 999, 18th St. 5th Floor, Denver, CO 80202, 2466; telephone (303) 312-6473.

People interested in commenting on the proposed NPL listing should send the original comments and three copies to: Docket Coordinator, Headquarters U.S. EPA, CERCLA Docket Office (5201G), 401 M Street SW, Washington, DC 20460; telephone (703) 603-9232.